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Susan Redington Bobby (ed.), *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings*

Sylvie Maurel

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Susan Redington Bobby (ed.), *Fairy Tales Reimagined: Essays on New Retellings* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2009), 260 p, ISBN: 978-0-7864-4115-0

1 Susan Redington Bobby's collection of essays furthers the discussion of the contemporary fairy tale, following Kate Bernheimer's observation that "we are experiencing an explosion of fairy tale influences in art and literature" (7). Today's fairy tales don various guises: they are brought into novels, recycled into novellas, short stories and poetry. The volume explores the latest transformations of classic fairy tales, ranging from the works of A.S. Byatt, Robert Coover or Jane Yolen, to Neil Gaiman or Philip Pullman and to Gaétan Soucy, Shannon Hale, Peg Kerr and Kate Bernheimer. Through commentary on the new tales themselves, with no foray into theory, Bobby seeks to show that contemporary fairy tales reflect changes in our world, while inventing new fairy-tale forms.

2 The collection is divided into four sections: "Redefining Gender and Sexuality", "Rewriting Narrative Forms", "Remembering Trauma and Dystopia", "Revolutionizing Culture and Politics". The first section opens with a very perceptive essay by Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère on "The Tale of the Shoe", the first tale in Emma Donoghue's collection *Kissing the Witch*. The main thread of the essay is Donoghue's use of intertextuality within the fairy-tale tradition. Identifying the various sources that come into play in "The Tale of the Shoe", de la Rochère successfully shows that Donoghue not only questions the norms of heterosexuality promoted by classic fairy tales but reveals the emancipatory potential of her sources. While spinning a new tale

from diverse old ones and arranging it into a chain narrative, she also says something about the fundamentally intertextual nature of the creative process. The second essay by Christa Mastrangelo Joyce examines a number of poems by Sara Henderson Hay, Anne Sexton, Sara de Ford and Olga Broumas. Through a mostly thematic discussion of the poems, Joyce argues that these women poets revive the fairy tales of the 17th-century French conteuses. Staging more realistic female characters or valorizing female connection instead of female rivalry, the poems are seen as "transliterations" (Broumas and Harries) of patriarchal old stories. In the third essay, Bethany Joy Bear coins the very interesting concept of "re-engendering" to analyse Peg Kerr's rewriting of Andersen's "The Wild Swans". Through this "re-engendering", Bear argues, Kerr reworks fairy-tale heroism and redemption in such a way that they may accommodate 21st-century concerns like homosexuality, AIDS and the role of communities. In the next essay, Joanne Campbell Tidwell engages in a rather descriptive study of both J.M. Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* and Jane Yolen's novella "Lost Girls". *Peter Pan* is seen as informed by Victorian ideas of gender; Yolen undertakes to make the Victorian subtext explicit and turns Peter into the clear embodiment and enforcer of the patriarchal order, while democratic pirates reintroduce a measure of the revolutionary folk tale into the late 19th-century bourgeois tale. In the last essay of the first section, Mathilda Slabbert investigates a male author's contribution to the predominantly female field of postmodernist recreations of fairy tales, and examines how Neil Gaiman's Stardust, "Troll Bridge" and "Snow, Glass and Apples" reshuffle the polarities of classic fairy tales, address the modern-day erosion of identity and "stimulate the reader's sense of the ontological" (81).

3 The second section of the book turns to self-reflexive postmodernist rewritings and very aptly opens on an essay by Jeffrey K. Gibson on A.S. Byatt's metafictional strategies in *Possession* and three of her fairy stories, "The Glass Coffin", "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye" and "The Story of the Eldest Princess". After providing an insightful reading of Possession as historiographic metafiction, the essay deals with the metafictional motif of plot/fate that is more fully developed in the last story, in which storytelling allows the eponymous princess to take control of her fate. Through this self-reflexive analogy of plot and fate, Byatt asserts the power of narrative to change the world, with particular emphasis on the roles of women in society. In the next essay, Marie Bouchet discusses Robert Coover's repetition with variation of the Sleeping Beauty myth in *Briar Rose*. This playful, typically postmodernist parody makes fun of fairy-tale conventions and of their shaping of the readers' expectations. Offering a wealth of narrative possibilities, *Briar Rose* questions the legitimacy of set patterns and awakens the reader to the arbitrariness of narrative. Repetition with variation is also on the agenda of Jeanette Winterson's *The Powerbook* which, Maureen Torpey argues, heavily draws on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books, while amplifying their structure and themes and taking them into the technological age of the 21st century. Another heavily intertextual body of works is under scrutiny in the final essay of the second section. In a survey of Robin McKinley's novels, most of which are recyclings of folk tales, Amie A. Doughty shows how intertextuality is gradually superseded by metatextuality. If McKinley's earlier work presents characters that are trapped in the intertextual net which limits their choices, in *Rose Daughter* and *Spindler's End*, her more recent folk-tale revisions, the characters break loose from the previous tales and author their own stories.

4 Section three deals with dystopian rewritings of fairy tales, the first example of which is Kate Bernheimer's *Complete Tales*. Helen Pilinovsky's essay on Bernheimer's first two novels sheds light on an interesting paradox which shapes much of Bernheimer's revisions: the utopian function of fairy tales as we have internalized it, the happily-ever-after, is made to feature as precisely the source of dystopian discomfort and disappointment. In the next essay, on the contrary, Margarete J. Landwehr explores the use and therapeutic role of fairy tales in trauma narratives, through Jane Yolen's *Briar Rose* and Louise Murphy's *Hansel and Gretel*, analyzed as allegories of the Holocaust. She very convincingly shows that fairy tales provide an adequate idiom for the rendition of unspeakable experiences, striking the necessary balance between accuracy and empathy thanks, in particular, to the power of fairy-tale metaphors. Ultimately, the protagonists' narratives stand as the victory of meaningful creation over destruction. The relationship between trauma narratives and fairy tales is further explored in Lauren Choplin's essay on Gaétan Soucy's *The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond of Matches*. Here the fairy tale acts as a form of abject and ontological entrapment as a girl, abused by her violent and demented father, ends up seeing herself as a character in her father's fairy tale. Her worldview is strictly determined by the conventions of the genre, such as flat characterization or narration of violence without pain. One convention Soucy subverts is the happy ending, thus suggesting that the reputedly consolatory or emancipatory genre will not be sufficient to liberate the heroine.

5 The last section includes essays investigating the cultural and political reach of fairy-tale revision. In his study of *Fables* by Bill Willingham, which only marginally deals with the fairy tale, Mark C. Hill analyzes the serialized comic book as a reflection of the growing conservatism of post 9/11 America. Hill argues that the series participates in the mythologizing of wartime masculinity and the glorification of war. In the next essay, Vanessa Joosen discusses Philip Pullman's sequel to "Cinderella", *I Was a Rat!*, which oscillates between traditional fairy-tale features and a late 20th-century context reminiscent of the Bulger case and of the sensational media coverage and public outrage it gave rise to in the United Kingdom. According to Joosen, Pullman's book raises the question of the image of childhood and tries to problematize the stereotyped constructions of the child, either innocent or evil, which the tabloids then circulated and exacerbated. In his study of Gregory Maguire's political tale, *Wicked*, a rewriting of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Christopher Roman focusses on the thin borderline between political dissent and terrorism, demonstrating through the deeds of the Wicked Witch of the West that the definition of evil is primarily the prerogative of a government whose power comes under threat. In the final essay of the collection, Susan Redington Bobby presents two novels by Shannon Hale, *The Goose Girl* and *Princess Academy* which are concerned with social reform and class consciousness, and thus explore a field only brushed on by classic fairy tales where class distinctions are taken for granted and upward mobility is achieved thanks to magic or marriage. The trials and tribulations of Hale's heroines earn them the power to change society either as altruistic rulers or as enlightened members of harmonious communities. Up to a point, Hale's books renew and reactivate the utopian dimension of classic fairy tales.

6 The essays included in Bobby's collection may perhaps be of unequal quality at times but the volume offers a great variety of useful leads to those who are interested in contemporary (revisions of) fairy tales. If the work of now canonical revisionists such as Sexton, Broumas, Yolen, Byatt or Winterson is discussed here, lesser-known authors

are also foregrounded and brought to scholarly attention. The collection also makes it clear that contemporary rewriting of fairy tales is in no way limited to the fields of gender or postmodernist metatextuality. The sections devoted to the links between fairy tales and trauma narratives, or between fairy tales and social and political commentary are particularly inspiring. In short, the volume provides evidence of the extraordinary vitality of today's fairy tale both in creative writing and in critical inquiry.

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Mots-clés: conte de fée, critique sociale, dystopie, genre, intertextualité, métafiction, politique, postmodernisme, réécriture, trauma
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AUTHORS

SYLVIE MAUREL

Maître de conférences
Université de Toulouse II-Le Mirail
maurelsylvie@free.fr